Montana Safe Schools Center

Matt Taylor, M.A.
Associate Director
Division of Educational Research and Service
The University of Montana
Missoula, MT 59812-6376
406-243-5367/243-2197 *Fax*
Matt.taylor@umontana.edu
www.dersum.org

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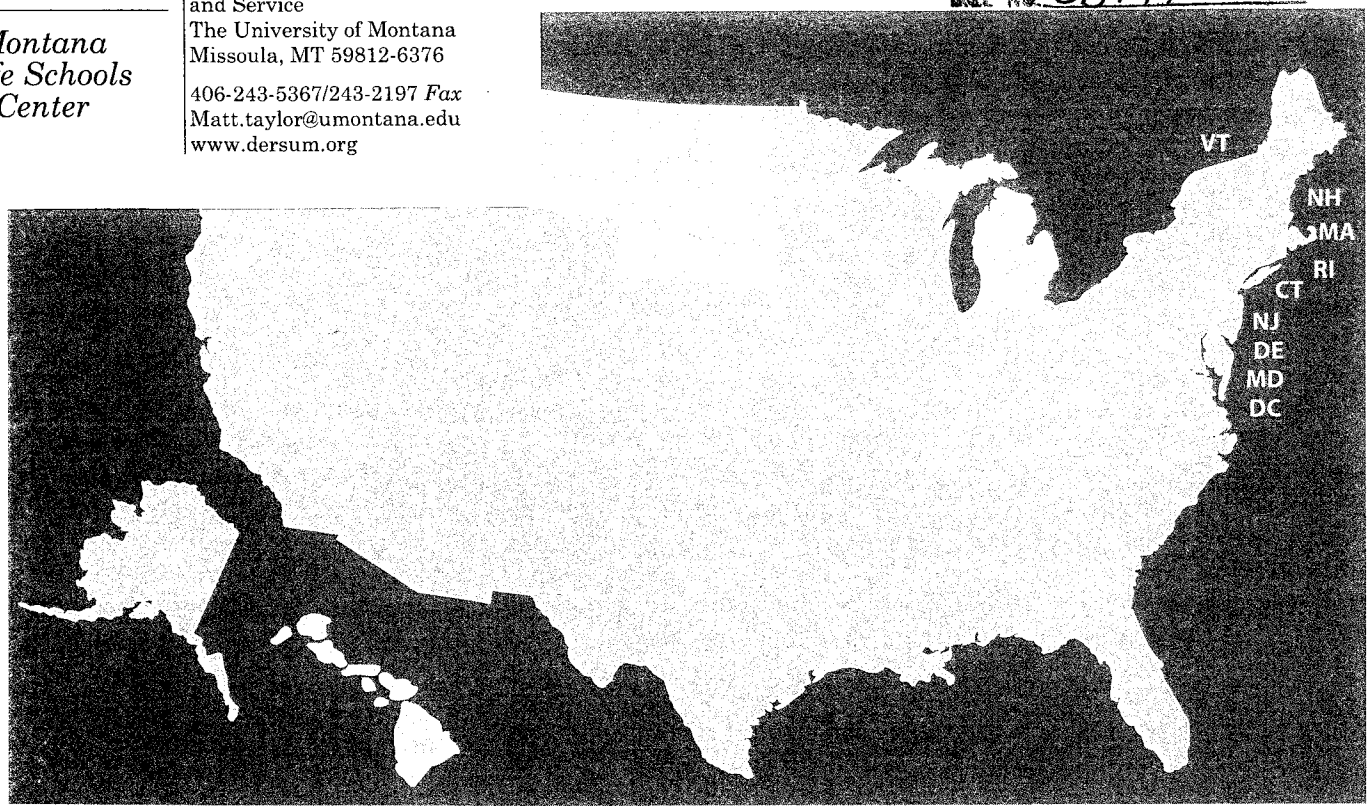

States with laws on Bullying

States with no laws on Bullying

Updated October 2010

To find a specific state law on bullying, go to the Web site for the state legislature and insert bullying as a search term.

States with laws on Bullying:

Alabama
Alaska
Arizona
Arkansas
California
Colorado
Connecticut
Delaware
Florida
Georgia
Idaho
Illinois
Indiana
Iowa
Kansas
Kentucky
Louisiana
Maine
Maryland
Massachusetts
Minnesota
Mississippi
Missouri
Nebraska
Nevada
New Hampshire
New Jersey
New Mexico
New York
North Carolina
Ohio
Oklahoma
Oregon
Pennsylvania
Rhode Island
South Carolina
Tennessee
Texas
Utah
Vermont
Virginia
Washington State
West Virginia
Wisconsin
Wyoming

States with no laws on Bullying:

District of Columbia
Hawaii
Michigan
Montana
North Dakota
South Dakota

STOP BULLYING NOW!
TAKE A STAND. LEND A HAND.

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TAKE A STAND. LEND A HAND.

HRSA
Health Resources and Services Administration

What We Know About Bullying

What is bullying?

Bullying is aggressive behavior that is intentional and that involves an imbalance of power or strength. Typically, it is repeated over time. A child who is being bullied has a hard time defending himself or herself.

Bullying can take many forms, such as hitting or punching (physical bullying); teasing or name-calling (verbal bullying); intimidation using gestures or social exclusion (nonverbal bullying or emotional bullying); and sending insulting messages by e-mail (cyberbullying).

Prevalence of bullying:

- Studies show that between 15–25 percent of U.S. students are bullied with some frequency ("sometimes or more often") while 15–20 percent report that they bully others with some frequency (Melton et al., 1998; Nansel et al., 2001).

- Recent statistics show that although school violence has declined 4 percent during the past several years, the incidence of behaviors such as bullying has increased by 5 percent between 1999 and 2001 (U.S. Dept. of Ed., 2002).

- Bullying has been identified as a major concern by schools across the U.S. (NEA[3], 2003).

- In surveys of third through eighth graders in 14 Massachusetts schools, nearly half who had been frequently bullied reported that the bullying had lasted six months or longer (Mullin-Rindler, 2003).

- Research indicates that children with disabilities or special needs may be at a higher risk of being bullied than other children (see Rigby, 2002, for review).

Bullying and gender:

- By self-report, boys are more likely than girls to bully others (Nansel et al., 2001; Banks 1997).

- Girls frequently report being bullied by both boys and girls, but boys report that they are most often bullied only by other boys (Melton et al., 1998; Olweus, 1993).

- Verbal bullying is the most frequent form of bullying experienced by both boys and girls. Boys are more likely to be physically bullied by their peers (Olweus, 1993; Nansel et al., 2001); girls are more likely to report being targets of rumor-spreading and sexual comments (Nansel et al., 2001). Girls are more more likely to bully each other using social exclusion (Olweus, 2002).

- Use of derogatory speculation about sexual orientation is so common that many parents do not think of telling their children that it could be hurtful (NEA[2], 2003).

Consequences of bullying:

- Stresses of being bullied can interfere with student's engagement and learning in school (NEA Today, 1999).

- Children and youth who are bullied are more likely than other children to be depressed, lonely, anxious, have low self-esteem, feel unwell, and think about suicide *(Limber, 2002; Olweus, 1993)*.

- Students who are bullied may fear going to school, using the bathroom, and riding on the school bus (NEA[1], 2003).

- In a survey of third through eighth graders in 14 Massachusetts schools, more than 14 percent reported that they were often afraid of being bullied (Mullin-Rindler, 2003).

- Research shows that bullying can be a sign of other serious antisocial or violent behavior. Children and youth who frequently bully their peers are more likely than others to get into frequent fights, be injured in a fight, vandalize or steal property, drink alcohol, smoke, be truant from school, drop out of school, and carry a weapon (Nansel et al., 2003; Olweus, 1993).

- Bullying also has an impact on other students at school who are bystanders to bullying (Banks, 1997). Bullying creates a climate of fear and disrespect in schools and has a negative impact on student learning (NEA[1], 2003).

Adult response to bullying

- Adults are often unaware of bullying problems (Limber, 2002). In one study, 70 percent of teachers believed that teachers intervene "almost always" in bullying situations; only 25 percent of students agreed with this assessment (Charach et al., 1995).

- 25 percent of teachers see nothing wrong with bullying or putdowns and consequently intervene in only 4 percent of bullying incidents (Cohn & Canter, 2002).

- Students often feel that adult intervention is infrequent and unhelpful and they often fear that telling adults will only bring more harassment from bullies (Banks, 1997).

- In a survey of students in 14 elementary and middle schools in Massachusetts, more than 30 percent believed that adults did little or nothing to help in bullying incidents (Mullin-Rindler, 2003).

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Missoulian

Missoula schools try to clear up complex issue of conflict vs. bullying

By JAMIE KELLY of the Missoulian | Posted: Sunday, September 19, 2010 6:45 am

Editor's note: This is the first of two stories on the issue of school bullying. The second will appear next Sunday, Sept. 26.

She was the weird kid with few friends.

And so was he.

She was a little overweight, loved medieval literature and punk music.

He was short and bug-eyed, and his black hair was spiked a foot in the places where his head wasn't shaved bald.

It was the mid-1980s, "The Breakfast Club" generation. The life skills class at Sentinel High School, studying the subject of love and nuptials, collectively decided these two punk-goth kids should get "married" for a class wedding project.

When Melissa Bruninga-Matteau and her "groom" refused, the class pounced on them, unleashing a string of insults and vicious taunts while everybody else laughed and pointed. "Weirdo," they said.

The pair might have turned to their teacher for comfort, Bruninga-Matteau said, but the teacher had joined in.

"It made me totally committed to getting the hell out of Missoula as fast and as far as possible," said Bruninga-Matteau, who today is an adjunct professor of humanities at Yavapai College in Arizona.

Flash-forward 25 years. The Bruninga-Matteaus of today - quiet or shy or disabled or artistic or gay or fringe or however else they're different - are no longer alone in Missoula's schools, at least not on paper. Bullying and its once-silent sufferers are now out of the shadows and in the spotlight of school administrators, teachers and a public proclaiming itself fed up with child tormentors.

But over the last decade, in their quest to stop it, Missoula's schools first had to ask:

What is bullying?

It's a short and simple question with a complex answer. Failure to get it right can put young, developing egos and entire futures at risk.

Amy Foster-Wolferman, a K-12 education specialist at the Montana Safe Schools Center housed at the University of Montana, conducts training sessions on bullying with school districts across the state.

"The first thing," she said, "is getting the staff on the same page as to what it is, and what it is not."

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Like almost every adult bullied as a kid, Bruninga-Matteau can recall in precise detail all the traumatic moments - and there were many during her Missoula youth.

So painful are the memories that when Bruninga-Matteau became a teacher, she dreaded going to work at the high school where she first taught. She only lasted a year.

"Stepping into a high school classroom was one of the hardest things I have ever done," she said. "I was, believe it or not, terrified of 14-year-olds."

So instead, she pursued her doctorate in humanities at the University of California at Irvine because "teaching in high school was something I could not face."

Her experiences speak to a key distinction between bullying and mere teasing.

It's the dark side of what Friedrich Nietzsche called "the will to power."

"They are looking for a victim," said Diane Hipp, a suicide-prevention counselor, children's author and co-developer of the "Kelso's Choice" anti-bullying program. "They're looking for someone, for lack of a better term, to prey on."

Hipp, who lives in Stevensville, is one of the speakers who will address a daylong seminar on bullying and conflict resolution on Oct. 1 at Ruby's Convention Center, sponsored by Families First Missoula.

The power that bullies assert over their victims is skewed greatly in their favor - by their size, age, social status at school or by sheer numbers of friends or followers.

When the bully discovers his or her victim is intimidated or scared, the bullying often gets more intense or frequent.

"Bullying is repetitive," said Marianne Moon, the Safe Schools coordinator for MCPS. "It's not just that your kid went to school and got punched out. It's intimidation, and it's long term."

Regular rough play, teasing and the occasional fight are normal occurrences and should not be confused with bullying, said Mike Williams, principal at Franklin Elementary, which has implemented a successful anti-bullying philosophy. (That program will be explained and explored in next Sunday's Missoulian.)

"One black eye is not bullying, necessarily," said Williams, who brought the "Kelso's Choice" program to Franklin five years ago. "That's a conflict, and you mediate a conflict."

Here's what you don't mediate.

Foster-Wolferman of the Montana Safe Schools Center slid a DVD into a laptop and played a video from the "Steps to Respect" program she shares with Montana school districts.

A grainy surveillance video shows a group of elementary school children on a playground at a Seattle school. A few students begin to circle a boy, who is then knocked to the ground and repeatedly beaten and kicked by several children as the others stand around and watch.

"It's disturbing, isn't it?" she said.

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"You look like a big, nasty lesbian. So, I was just wondering if insecurities in your sexuality have anything to do with how you treat our site, homosexual."

You don't have to scroll down very far to find that message left on a website for teens to chat about their issues.

Bullying hasn't changed much since "Cain and Abel started it," said Judy Wright. But the methods have.

The Missoula author, educator and speaker on parenting, relationships and self-esteem has a particular new interest in cyber-bullying and is writing a book on the subject. She is also the founder of cyberbullyinghelp.com.

Not all cases are as high-profile as that of Phoebe Prince, the Massachusetts teen who commited suicide, allegedly after prolonged cyber-bullying. Several of her schoolmates face stalking, harassment and other charges.

But the Internet is a vast new virtual playground where bullies thrive, Wright said. And that has changed everything.

"We used to consider our homes safe," said Wright, who has worked with Head Start and Hospice. "If we can just make it home, we'll be safe. But cyber-bullying goes beyond that, because it follows you home."

Websites, online message boards, Myspace and Facebook have exposed another glaring difference between bullying and normal conflict: the absence of empathy. Anonymity - or at least the perception of it - feeds the bully's aggression because it negates the natural human tendency toward empathy.

It's especially rampant online, because the bully can't see the "nonverbal messages" - body language - of the victim, who may be in great pain.

Children speak with their bodies, even more than they do with their words, Wright said.

"And that nonverbal message is what people believe," she said. "Face to face, a bully might think, 'Oh, this kid is going to start bawling,' and then stop. When they don't have that buffer of body language, there are none of those emotional signals."

Like other anti-bullying speakers and educators, Wright said it is important to distinguish bullying from mere teasing or criticism.

Some parents believe their child's feelings should never be hurt, and that all children should be friends. And that's entirely unrealistic.

"Not everybody is going to like them," said Wright. "And that's just a fact of life. What we don't need to do is build a self-fulfilling prophecy, where everybody is a victim."

Next Sunday: How Missoula's schools respond to bullying, and resources available to students, parents and schools.

Reach reporter Jamie Kelly at 523-5254 or at jkelly@missoulian.com.

Missoulian

Missoula schools try to stop bullying before it begins

By JAMIE KELLY of the Missoulian | Posted: Sunday, September 26, 2010 6:30 am

Editor's note: This is the second of two stories on the issue of school bullying. The first appeared last Sunday, Sept. 19.

It was lunchtime at Hellgate High School early last week and students filed out of the building, a few lighting up smokes on their way to get a slice of pizza or a convenience store burrito.

A teenager flanked by about a dozen others sized up a kid with purple highlights in his hair walking by, then - quite audibly - hurled an unprintable insult that got his friends chuckling.

It was a mean-spirited and cheap laugh for the teenager, who is probably not persistently harassing or intimidating his target. Data show an unmistakable decline in school bullying across the state of Montana.

But it's the single impetus to separate or hate that most concerns Heidi Wallace.

"What is fueling or stirring that behavior?" asked Wallace, the director of youth development with the National Coalition Building Institute in Missoula.

Wallace and the NCBI aren't just discovering what motivates the bully - much of it falls under the "isms" of bigotry, they say, like racism, sexism, classism. But NCBI is doing something about it, trying to change "hearts and minds" in Missoula's schools by involving the students themselves.

Jock, geek, goth, nerd, freak and even bully - they're all invited to Wallace's table in schools across western Montana, where the NCBI sets up "Respect Clubs," trains teachers and helps launch schoolwide efforts to undercut bullying.

NCBI's initiative is among a host of anti-bullying efforts within the Missoula County Public Schools district and beyond.

"I can't think of any issue we take more seriously," said Marianne Moon, the MCPS Safe Schools coordinator.

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The Jesuits have a saying: "Give me a child until he is 7 and I will give you the man."

Attitudes are learned young and are, therefore, difficult to undo.

So the focus within MCPS and other districts has been on anti-bullying campaigns at the elementary school level.

"We won't rest until it's eliminated," said Mike Williams, principal at Franklin Elementary, which has an anti-bullying program in place. "But we're also realistic because we know it happens."

In 1999, MCPS received a federal Safe Schools grant, and among its first priorities was placing a mental health counselor in each elementary school to deal directly with bullying behavior and also to establish resources for parents, students and teachers.

Crystal Thompson has been Franklin's sole counselor for the last five years.

Every week in every class, Thompson is in front of the school's students to talk about bullying - teaching them specific techniques about how to spot it and the numerous choices and resources they have to deal with it. It also teaches them to reach out to the kid who's always alone and consistently ignored by others.

"I feel that we do so much preventative work that we rarely have to sit down for an instance of actual bullying," said Thompson. MCPS elementary counselors all gather monthly, and the subject of bullying is among the big topics.

MCPS has a districtwide program in place - the conflict-resolution "Second Step" curriculum - but each school is also free to pursue its own strategy in addition to it. The most popular is the "Kelso's Choice" program, co-written by Diane Hipp, a children's author and counselor who lives in Stevensville. That program has been in place at Franklin for five years.

"It really tries to get at the issue before bullying begins," said Hipp, who is the featured speaker at an anti-bullying symposium in Missoula on Oct. 1 at Ruby's Inn Convention Center.

Featuring a little dog named Kelso, the program teaches children nine choices when confronted with bullying or intimidating behavior, and the differences between a "small problem" like teasing and a "big problem" that the student should report.

"If you can give kids that internal locus of control to know what to do when they're faced with problems like this, it sets a really positive school climate," said Hipp.

Every major anti-bullying program adopted by schools in Missoula County focuses on creating that kind of atmosphere. All of them involve parents, who are also encouraged to report bullying to school counselors.

After years of complaints about bullying, Target Range School bought the Olweus Anti-Bullying Program last year, which trained its teachers and staff about how to respond to bullying on school grounds. The program costs thousands of dollars and is in its first year of implementation.

While expensive, the Olweus program, first developed in Sweden about 30 years ago, is the most popular anti-bullying program in the country and the model for numerous other programs. In Kalispell, every public school has adopted it, and Target Range has joined the Hellgate Elementary District in implementing it in Missoula.

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The other side of intimidation and fear and physical injury is the bully himself - or herself. Make no mistake: Girls bully too.

Chrissy Godbout has known that since the first grade. At her school in Arizona, she had food and rocks thrown at her, and children "singing about my death in front of me."

"I've been severely bullied most of my life," said Godbout, now a freshman at Hellgate. "And that's why I'm here."

Godbout is one of the numerous MCPS students who are members of the Youth Advisory Council, one of the programs run by NCBI.

The after-school group meets regularly at the NCBI office, upstairs from the YWCA on Missoula's North Side.

Its student leaders work with the Respect clubs at each of Missoula's three middle schools, help write grants and report on bullying and intimidation issues at their high schools.

Wallace, who advises the Youth Advisory Council, stressed that bullies are not its "target."

"We look at somebody who is mistreating others as being mistreated themselves," she said.

Kids who bully others have most likely learned the behavior at home, in an environment where it's tolerated or promoted, Wallace said.

MCPS and other districts have "zero tolerance" policies in place, ones that punish students who bully. Students are given detention and suspension, and in rare cases, expelled.

But simply punishing a bully and walking away without any attempt to understand the behavior is a mistake, said Marcy Otten, a K-12 specialist with the Montana Safe Schools Center, housed on the UM campus.

"We really try to support childhood behavioral changes rather than just kick them out," said Otten, whose office trains Montana schools in anti-bullying techniques. "In the long term, you're not helping the child develop any skills."

Williams, the Franklin principal, said any anti-bullying philosophy must also be clear about consequences for bullying, and consistent as well - which he calls the "surety" of punishment.

"Doing that makes a big statement," he said. "They know we are trying to bully-proof this school."

So how does all of this work? Compassion? Punishment? Empowerment?

It all works together. But on the larger issue of tackling bullying at school, maybe Williams said it best.

"It's not necessarily rocket science," he said. "But it is a complicated issue."

Reporter Jamie Kelly can be reached at 523-5254 or at jkelly@missoulian.com.